

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **REP. BOB BISCHOFF'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – In the last days of a legislative session, all attention turns to House-Senate conference committees, the groups that help lawmakers reach final agreements on the major issues.

This year will be no different. In the last two weeks of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, conference committees will be charged with reaching a consensus on the state budget, daylight-saving time and education reforms.

Since this part of the process is so important, but so hard to follow, I wanted to start this week's Report by talking about how conference committees work.

These groups are made up of four legislators, two from the House and two from the Senate. Generally, there are two Republicans and two Democrats on a conference committee, but it is common to see the groups filled out only by the majority party in each chamber.

Their charge is to resolve any differences between the House and Senate version of a particular bill. On many occasions, those differences are minor and an agreement is reached quickly. A committee report detailing that agreement is signed, then voted upon by both the House and Senate. If both chambers approve the report, the measure goes on to the governor for final action.

That's what happens when everything goes to plan. When it doesn't, the legislative process gets interesting, infuriating and very hard to follow. The key term is germaneness.

The general rule of thumb is that a conference committee report can only deal with specific subject matter. Any other idea placed into the report must have the same subject matter or run the risk of not being considered germane.

With two weeks to go in the session, rules of germaneness are usually followed to the letter. In the final days and hours, though, leaders tend to loosen the restrictions and begin adding many different subjects to a conference committee report. In the Legislature, this is commonly called log-rolling or creating a Christmas tree.

You will see conference committees on all of 2005's major issues, including House Bill 1001, the biennial state budget, and House Bill 1120, which contains the Senate Republican tax increases to help fund the budget. Many of the final agreements are made at the very last moment, and there are times when it takes several weeks for any of us to figure out what has taken place.

House Republicans promise that all representatives will get at least 24 hours to study the final budget before voting on it. I hope they will be able to hold to that promise, because they need to do a lot of work to improve a plan that reduces education funding and increases property taxes.

I also continue to be worried that the majorities in both the House and the Senate want to use riverboat money from this area to help balance the state budget. I have talked with several of the conferees on the budget bill, and they are aware of the impact the loss of these funds will have on us. I am confident they will fight to protect our interests, but I encourage you to continue to call the Statehouse and register your concern about this plan.

The action will be on a fast track and I will try to keep you posted on everything that takes place. In the space I have left, let me tell you about some of the actions that have taken place in the House the past few days.

Senate Bill 127, which would bring daylight-saving time to Indiana, will be going to a conference committee. After several tries, the House passed the legislation by the narrowest of margins, a vote that indicates the strong divisions this issue causes among the public. Although the governor has waffled on whether he wants most of Indiana to observe daylight-saving time in the Eastern or Central Time Zones, it is apparent that he does want the time change in place. It remains to be seen if the governor's support will translate to legislative approval.

House members from both parties teamed up to reject several education measures that would have passed costs on to local school corporations, due in large part to concerns that the provisions would harm schools across Indiana that already are looking at cuts in state support. This included Senate Bill 281, which would have revived the school voucher program, and Senate Bill 371, which would have moved the ISTEP test from the fall to the spring.

Representatives also defeated a proposal that would have allowed a pilot program for automated traffic law systems. These systems would have featured a camera device that produced still photographs of any vehicle that proceeds through a red light at targeted intersections.

House members were able to amend Senate Bill 508 to increase benefits for workers injured on the job. The proposal, which will end up in a conference committee, will raise benefits in two areas: the average weekly wage paid to an injured worker while he or she is away from the job, and the one-time benefit paid to cover the loss of a limb in a work-related accident.

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